

Political Patronage at Township of Middletown Sewerage Authority Stinks

The Middletown Township Committee and the Township of Middletown Sewerage Authority (TOMSA) Board and Executive Director have been using TOMSA as a political patronage pit for many years. The seven-member TOMSA board currently includes the Middletown GOP vice chairperson, the Middletown GOP treasurer, and a former Republican mayor. Four of the seven are current Republican district committeepersons. The Executive Director was also a former Republican mayor, and TOMSA's attorney is a member of the law firm of our former Township Attorney.

Board members receive an annual salary of \$1,750 (\$2,150 for the Executive Director), medical benefits, and pension credit. Qualified taxpayer-funded lifetime medical benefits are also extended to spouses. These lucrative benefits are provided even though the board meets for less than one hour per month, and recipients include a member that phones in six months a year because he lives out of state.

In 2008, the State of New Jersey passed a law to eliminate benefits for newly appointed board members, but the Township Committee gets around that law by continuing to re-appoint their friends when their terms expire. The end result today is that two members have been on the TOMSA Board for almost 25 years, another member has been on the Board for almost 15 years, and most of the remaining members have been on the board for over 5 years. That is not just wasteful, it is disrespectful of Township taxpayers.

Middletown should no longer fund a board of this size at this rate, especially since the Middletown Township sewerage system is largely built out; the Board (established in 1966) has served its original purpose of managing the installation of a sewerage system throughout Middletown Township. Middletown taxpayers could save about \$100,000 annually in salary and benefits by eliminating the Sewerage Authority Board and reassigning the responsibilities to a department like Public Works.

Political patronage is a serious violation of the public's trust. In 2008, Republican Governor Chris Christie harshly criticized the largely Democratic Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission for using the board as their "piggy bank" for patronage jobs. He said the commission was, "a remnant of New Jersey that should be part of our embarrassing past." He stepped in and fired 71 people. Records showed they were funneling money to no-bid contracts with political insiders.

In Middletown, it is hard to determine exactly what TOMSA is doing with our tax dollars because they routinely break laws designed to give the public insight into what they do. Among their violations: failure to announce public hearings, failure to disclose private meetings, refusal to satisfy Open Public Records Act requests for information, and refusal to allow video recordings of public meetings. When citizens ask questions at Board meetings, members remain silent and defer all questions to the Executive Director, who is deliberately vague in his responses. The Executive Director also refuses to respond to phone calls, emails, and in-person inquiries for information. TOMSA's attorney allows the routine disregard of these laws and other blatant conflicts of interest, like when TOMSA's Executive Director held both that position and

a seat on the Township Committee at the same time. Likewise, the TOMSA auditor routinely attends board meetings, which calls into question the independence of his audit.

Taxpayer advocates have been trying to understand how the Township Committee and the TOMSA Board get away with their clear disregard for Middletown taxpayers. Our Township Committee has been advised of all of these taxpayer concerns but they refuse to address the matter and assail those who question them. It is time for our elected officials to break this “piggy bank” and remove the stink of patronage and secrecy from the Township Of Middletown Sewerage Authority.

WHO’S WHO AT TOMSA-

Patrick Parkinson- TOMSA Executive Director 15 years

- Middletown mayor (2004)
- Former Township Committeeperson

Thomas F. Stokes- TOMSA Board 24 years

- Former Middletown Township Board of Education member
- Calls in 6 meetings a year

James Hinckley- TOMSA Board 23 years

- Current Middletown GOP, treasurer

Chantal Bouw- TOMSA Board 14 years

- Current Middletown GOP, Vice Chair
- Current Zoning Board, Vice Chair
- Local Assistance Board

Joan Smith- TOMSA Board 7 years

- Middletown mayor (2001)

Charles W. Rogers- TOMSA Board 5 years

- Current Republican Committeeperson
- Emergency Services Manager

Emil F. Wrede- TOMSA Board 4 years (alternate)

- Zoning Board

Anthony DeMarco- TOMSA Board 2012 (alternate)

William A. Meyler- TOMSA Auditor-

Richard C. Leahey Jr.- TOMSA Attorney – Law firm of former Township attorney Bernard Reilly

John D. Van Dorpe- TOMSA engineer/ Maser Consulting- paid roughly 7% of TOMSA annual budget